

Syracuse University

SURFACE

Muslim Student Life

Spring 2020

[Rethinking] Muslim Student Life at Syracuse University 2019-2020

Muslim Student Life at Syracuse University

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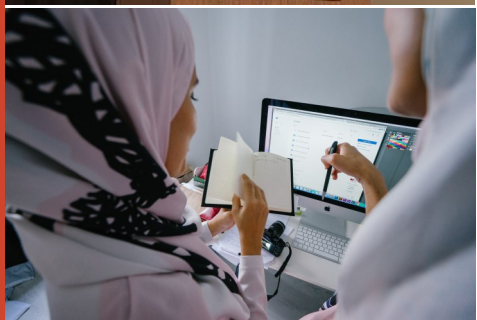
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2020/2021



[RETHINKING]
MUSLIM STUDENT LIFE
at Syracuse University

Annual Report 2019-2020



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ABOUT US

The Muslim Student Life at Syracuse University was established to enable our Muslim students to build a community, learn skills to become participatory global citizens, engage in meaningful programs and initiatives while maintain and build a healthy Muslim identity.

OUR MISSION

To create an inclusive community and to engage in sincere reflections that result in religious, intellectual, and social growth through educational programs and spiritual guidance based on Islamic principles.

OUR VALUES

Belief
Community
Outreach
Stewardship
Hospitality
Excellence

“INFORMING,
EDUCATING AND
EMPOWERING THE
FUTURE LEADERS &
AMBASSADORS OF
ISLAM”

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This month marks the full three years since the Muslim Student Life (MSL) at SU's board appointed me to serve as the full-time Muslim Chaplain at Syracuse University. Today, while reflecting over the last three years, I cannot be grateful enough for all opportunities, friendships, connections, and the amount of support and trust that I have received. It makes me happy to witness the growth of our Muslim community and be a part of it. Along with our mission to create an inclusive community and engage in sincere reflections that result in religious, intellectual, and social growth through educational programs and spiritual guidance based on Islamic principles, we keep exploring opportunities and creating new resources to improve Muslim students' experience.

Over the 2019/2020 academic year, we had significant accomplishments and started some critical discussions about Muslim students' experience. After the renovation, the Main Chapel of Hendricks Chapel opened its doors for our Friday services (Jumu'ah). Now we are finally able to accommodate the thriving Muslim community on campus. Halal food is available in all five dining halls. We worked with SU Food Services over the summer to improve the Halal menu, communicate around its availability, and explore Ramadan accommodations. MSA room should be renovated by the time students are back on campus. We confirmed with the University College that the prayer room in their facility would continue to be available for Muslim students. Besides, we started conversations around the possibility of having prayer rooms in the residents' halls and Bird Library. Finally, we work with a few offices to explore adjustment of the course schedules on Fridays to accommodate all Muslim students to attend Friday services.

This report is a concise overview of the 2019/2020 academic year, and it displays only some of the programs and accomplishments of our students. It shows that they continue to excel academically, socially, and spiritually. Being a part of the broader Hendricks Chapel community, we organized this report around the Chapel's overarching values of belief, community, outreach, stewardship, and excellence. You will recognize that our impact, reach, and presence is not just on the SU campus, rather beyond it.

Today, I proudly share that we celebrate a strong Muslim community and continues students' engagement with Muslim Life at SU. All this is possible because of your continued support and trust, as Syracuse University does not provide any financial assistance to any chaplaincy. We appreciate that you recognize the depth, importance, and meaning of our presence and services. It is needed now more than ever before. On behalf of the MSL and Muslim students, accept our heartfelt gratitude for your commitment to our work.

Jazakumu-Allahu Khairan,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Amir Durić".

Imam Amir Durić
Muslim Chaplain
Muslim Student Life at Syracuse University



NEW SEATING IN HENDRICKS CHAPEL ACCOMMODATES JUMMAH PRAYER

"I am thankful for the outstanding efforts of our chaplains, staff, student leaders and advisors. This latest renovation, which would not be possible without our partners in Campus Planning, Design and Construction, is part of Syracuse University's larger efforts to foster and support an inclusive, accessible campus of opportunity for a richly diverse student body."

-Brian Konkol, PhD.
Dean of Hendricks Chapel

"I am excited and grateful that we are starting the new academic year with a more accommodating Main Chapel. I have always considered the chapel an interfaith sanctuary, but we have never been able to use it in this capacity for our Friday prayer. This change won't just accommodate the growing number of Muslim students on campus; it will also help them develop a sense of belonging in the chapel."

-Amir Durić
Muslim Chaplain



SAAD SAYED

Engineering Management, M.S. at Syracuse University

Graduate Assistant, Resource Sharing and Reserves - SU Libraries
Co-Chair, Student Life Committee - Graduate Student Organization

Never did I think that I would be in Syracuse pursuing my Master's in Engineering Management. I still remember when I was a sophomore, I was planning to pursue higher studies from Saudi Arabia or UAE. Naturally, since I was schooled in Dubai, UAE; being brought up in a Muslim country, influenced my outlook towards my future and my ambitions. I was never of the opinion to be anywhere rather than the GULF. Intentions were pristine - stay clear of 'Fitna' and be moderate. Hence, Master's in the US was out of the question. But, there is someone 'Who' is the best planner of All. After much recommendation and contemplation, Syracuse University was the only university that stood out for its Islamic presence and hence my only choice. It seems that I was destined to be here. Looking back, everything happens for a reason! I was fascinated by the Muslim community in Syracuse which made me introspect of my position in the eyes of 'The Almighty'. On one side was me, a 'Muslim by Birth' and on the other, people who were 'Muslim by Choice'. How pleased would 'The Almighty' be with them!! All in all, SU binds diversity the way our fingers make a fist. Not to forget - the efforts by the MSL and the MLS board at SU for their relentless work towards preserving a better, peaceful and inclusive diversity at SU. "All Praise to the Almighty, He is the Best Planner of All".



In the fall of 2019, I had the privilege of participating in the Understanding Islam Series led by Imam Amir Durić. It was fascinating and enlightening as well as thought provoking as we learned about different tenets of the Islam religion and had multiple opportunities for discussion and questions within our diverse group of Muslims and non-Muslims. I discovered the multitude of shared beliefs and values Islam has with many other religions and had many of my misconceptions corrected. I would highly recommend this series to anyone interested in learning more about Islam in general and as an exploration of faith on an intellectual and personal level. The Imam is exceptionally knowledgeable and personable; a wonderful teacher who makes this a not to be missed opportunity.

THERESA HOLTSBERY NEDDO

Syracuse University doctoral candidate

SCSD retired teacher

Roman catholic

Glad that I took the class. As a non Muslim, I wanted to learn about Islam, and after taking the 7 week series, I'm glad I did. The Imam is a wonderful person and is very knowledgeable and is eager to share with the class. I highly recommend the series.

MARK ALLEN

Small Business Owner

Agnostic

I have attended the Islamic Lecture Series for three semesters now at Syracuse. In the beginning, I was excited by the opportunity to learn more about Islam. However, this is not simply an 'introductory course,' Imam Amir does fantastic job of arranging an array of topics from semester to semester that bring together Muslims and non-Muslims alike. An additional aspect of this program is the diversity of both participants and guest speakers. From SU and the surrounding community, each semester brings participants from different walks of life and faith backgrounds that further enhances the experience. For as long as the series continues, I will keep returning.

IVY RAINES

Ph.D. Student Political Science

Maxwell School, Syracuse University

Muslim Students and COVID-19:

Understanding the Needs of Muslim Students within Higher Education

AMIR DURIĆ

ERMIN SINANOVIĆ

MIRJAKHON TURDIEV



IN COLLABORATION WITH



Muslim Student Life
Syracuse University

JUNE 2020

"It's been pretty tough as my social life has significantly decreased and I am a very social person. My anxiety and depression has increased significantly (I am diagnosed with anxiety and depression) so this situation hasn't helped. I appreciate what MSL has done in offering different opportunities for students to engage in at this time. I hope more people take advantage of the services offered by MSL and MSA. Thank you for everything!"

—SURVEY RESPONDENT

Over the last couple years, chaplain Amir Durić observed that while other faith groups make decisions based on current data from its community members, Muslim communities tend to make decisions based on handful individual's limited experiences. Recognizing this and the lack of the broader understanding of Muslim student needs in the institutions of higher education in U.S., chaplain Durić was able to submit a proposal and obtain a small grant with the Center for Islam in Contemporary World at Shenandoah University (CICW) to conduct a national survey to gain better insights into the needs and challenges that Muslim students experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The survey was conducted in March & April, 2020 and the report was published on June 1st, 2020 by Chaplain Durić, Mirjakhon Turdiev, who is a Ph.D. student at Social Science Department of Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, and Ermin Sinanović, who is Syracuse University alum and the executive director of CICW. In addition to identifying challenges and needs of Muslim students, the report also provides practical recommendations for stakeholders who can assist in addressing these issues, i.e. institutions of higher education, (Muslim) chaplaincies, and Islamic institutions. The report was well received within the higher education community, particularly among chaplains, counselors, and inclusion and diversity departments. The full report is available at:

https://www.contemporaryislam.org/uploads/1/2/2/1/122197478/muslim_students_and_covid-19_report_final.pdf



RESOURCES

ABILITY TO ACCOMMODATE **300+** STUDENTS
FOR JUMU'AH (FRIDAY) SERVICE IN THE MAIN CHAPEL

HALAL FOOD IN ALL **FIVE** DINING HALLS

MUSLIM CHAPLAIN PROVIDED OVER **150**
ONE-ON-ONE SESSIONS
TO STUDENTS

SERVED OVER **1600**
FREE MEALS TO STUDENTS

234 STUDENTS ATTENDED
MSL'S ISLAM RELATED CLASSES &
STUDY CIRCLES

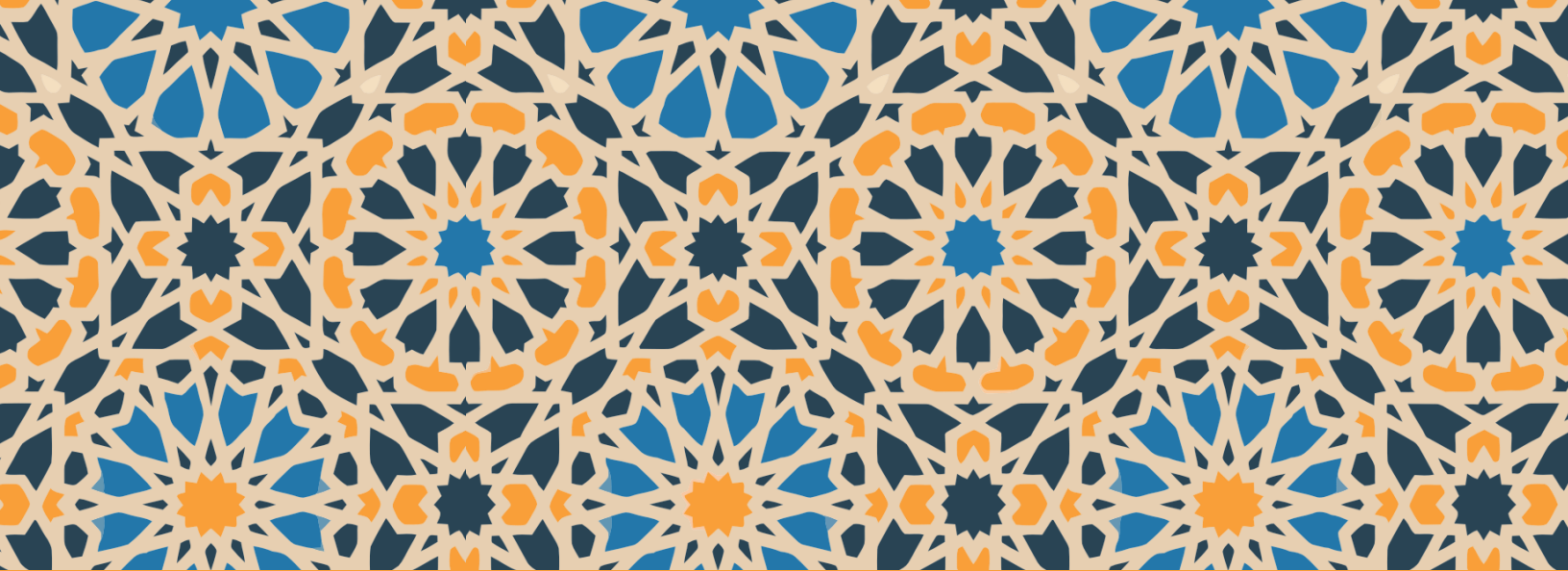


RECRUIT &

SERVED STUDENTS FROM
30+ COUNTRIES



MSL WAS
REPRESENTED AT
THREE
NATIONAL
CONVENTIONS



RETENTION

REACHED OUT TO **100+** MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS & ISLAMIC CENTERS

PARTNERED WITH **19** COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING LOCAL MOSQUES

ASSISTED MSA'S FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT **10** BLM ORGANIZATIONS & BUSINESSES

MSL's NEW **THREE BOARD MEMBERS** ARE SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI

REPUTATION

PUBLISHED THE **1ST** NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 ON MUSLIM STUDENTS IN HIGHER ED WITH CICW

OUR WORK WAS FEATURED IN **10+** NEWS ARTICLES ON AND OFF CAMPUS

498 STUDENTS FROM **32** U.S. STATES PARTICIPATED IN COVID-19 SURVEY

COLLABORATION WITH **17** STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS



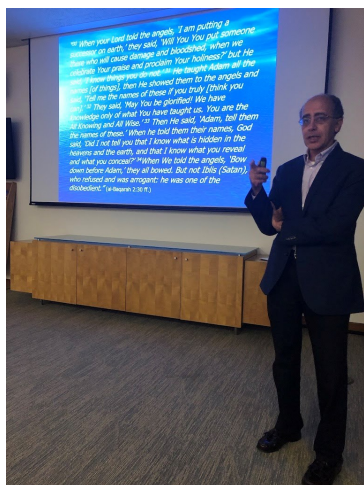


OUTREACH & PROGRAMS

“All of my classes and exams have transitioned to an online format. This has been stressful as now most of the responsibility has been placed on the students to make time for everything. It is also hard to now build relationships with professors which may have been able to help you in the future. Without the in person contact, it becomes difficult to build any good/ personal relations”

- Student Survey Respondent

The 2019/2020 academic year has been very unique given the changing circumstances due to COVID-19. Nevertheless, Muslim Student Life continued its commitment to serve our students and community throughout the year. The **Welcome Back Dinner** attracted more than 100 students and community members to kick off the new academic year with reach program, food, and networking activities. We hosted the annual **comedy event** with Mohammed “Mo” Mustafa Amer, an American stand-up comedian and writer of Palestinian descent best known for his Netflix comedy special, **Mo Amer: The Vagabond**, and his role as one third of the comedy trio Allah Made Me Funny. The annual **Understanding Islam Series** had another unique series with guest speakers from local community that included Sh. Khalil Abdul Kabir, Ahmet Çelik, Anisa Diab, Dr. Mohamed Khater, and Imam Muris Neimarlija. At the end of the series, the chaplain took the participants to visit a local mosque. Dr. Aras Konjhodzic gave a lecture on **“Science and Qur’an in the Light of Modern Criticism.”** The Chaplain continued his **What’s Brewing with the Muslim Chaplain** both in person & later virtually. Friday program was offered in person until the COVID-19 closure. Each Friday students benefited from **Recitation of Surah Khaf** in the MSA Room, **Jumah prayer** in main chapel, **free lunch & coffee** in the Noble Room and **Tafseer Class**. Throughout the academic year the Chaplain provided **Qur’an Study, Hifz Program, and Weekly Student Leadership Meetings & Reflections** both in person and virtually. The Tafsir Class was facilitated by Ahmet Çelik, a Ph.D. Student in Department of Religion.





SU Muslim Students' Association presents

NASHEED NIGHT WELCOMING RAMADAN

Virtual Event

Featuring

AMMAR CHARAF
&
IMAM DZEMAL CRNKIC





Zoom Meeting ID:
99860360540

Facebook Live:
tinyurl.com/ya2gnb9m

7 PM April 18, 2020

Join us on Zoom
or Facebook Live

WELCOME BACK DINNER



CAMPUS & COMMUNITY

Both the chaplain and Muslim students continued to engage and participate in various programs, events, and initiatives, both on campus and off campus. Members of various students organization, who identify as Muslims, participated and represented the Muslim community at several on-campus events, to include **Avi Shabbat** and **Interfaith Dinner**, 'Pray the Devil Back to Hell' movie screening with Lutheran Campus Ministry and Campus Connect, **Welcome Dinner for International Students**, **Rose Laying Ceremony**, **Remembrance Scholars**, **Multicultural Fair**, and **Student Involvement Fair**. The Muslim Student Association (MSA) hosted the **Islamic Awareness Week** on-campus, the event included **Roses Stories**, where members of MSA handed out roses to other students on campus, each rose had a hadith on it. Further, our students organized and supported **We Rise Above The Streets**, a local organization that is assisting homeless individuals i.e. providing free meals.



“Many students will say that they are not religious but spiritual, not because they are not religious but because they think that people don’t like those who are religious.” (Ingrid Mattson, ACURA-NACUC Annual Conference, Connecticut, 2020)

Dr. Mattson spoke about the need to cherish safe spaces on campuses, and areas that are religious positive or faith positive, where students will not hide their real identity, but feel confident about it and feel the celebration of such spaces. We are happy to witness such progress at Syracuse University, where Hendricks Chapel is a spiritual and physical heart on campus and home for nine chaplaincies and twenty-nine spiritual and religious organizations. Muslim students feel a full sense of belonging in the MSA room, Main Chapel on Fridays, and Noble Room when studying, sharing meals with other Muslim and non-Muslim students, or at Peoples Place during the MSL Coffee Hour. The fact that the number of Muslim students who come to the Chapel for various programs tripled over the last two years shows that many Muslim students celebrate this space and perceive it as a home away from home. Syracuse University promotes different faith expressions through blessings, invocations, and benedictions at almost all their ceremonies, celebrations, and large programs. This academic year, Muslim Chaplain was invited to offer a food blessing at the University traditional Thanksgiving Celebration and Welcome Dinner for International Students. He also offered a blessing during the Rose Laying Ceremony for 31st Pan Am Flight 103 Remembrance Ceremony.





LOOKING FORWARD TO 2020/2021

For many of us, religion is about community, celebrating holidays, and feeling connected with others who share similar interests. Since Syracuse University announced reopening this fall, we plan to resume our Friday services (Jumu'ah) on August 27th in the Main Chapel of Hendricks Chapel at 1:10 pm. Friday prayers had been a way for Syracuse Muslim students to practice their faith and come together weekly. Please be advised that we will follow the University's guidelines for Fall 2020, and thus ensure that you wear a mask, keep social distancing, preferably bring your prayer rug, and avoid physical contact (shaking hands). To receive all updates about reopening, please visit <https://www.syracuse.edu/fall2020/>.

Further, we plan to offer Understanding Islam, six-weeks series, Spiritual Sitdowns, Tafsir Class on Fridays, Student Leadership Meetings, Qur'an Study Sessions, One-on-One Sessions with the Chaplain, and more. For details, email the Chaplain at aduric@syr.edu and follow us on social media platforms.





SUPPORTING OUR MUSLIM STUDENTS

“INFORMING, EDUCATING AND EMPOWERING THE FUTURE LEADERS AND AMBASSADORS OF ISLAM”

The Muslim Student Life at Syracuse University was established to enable Muslim students to build a community, learn skills to become participatory global citizens, engage in meaningful programs and initiatives while maintain and build a healthy Muslim identity.

We would like to thank our donors for their generous gifts and continued support, without you any of the work that has been accomplished within the last academic year and so far would have not been possible.

Thank you!

If you would like to help us continue our tradition of servicing Muslim students and representing Islam in its true light at Syracuse University by making a gift to the Muslim Student Life at Syracuse University, please contact us at msl@syr.edu or visit <http://mslatsu.org> to give online.

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